



Incorporating Local Products into Summer Meals - Partners

Schools across the country are increasingly bringing local and regional foods onto the menu and teaching kids where their food comes from. With harvests at their peak and farms in full production, summer is a perfect time to highlight local products and feature food, agriculture, and nutrition education in programming at summer meal sites.

The term “farm to school” broadly encompasses *numerous* activities that can enrich summer meal programs. Summer is an ideal time to add variety to keep meals tasting great, connect the community with local agricultural producers, and provide hands-on enrichment activities for children and adolescents.

Sponsors can involve local farmers and food by:

- Purchasing local foods for meals and snacks
- Growing or visiting edible gardens
- Promoting nutrition lessons focused on fresh, healthy, local foods
- Offering agriculture-based, hands-on activities
- Organizing farm field trips
- Teaching students how to cook or prepare locally grown food
- Conducting taste tests with fresh local foods
- Sending newsletters home for parents that engage parents around local foods

One Sponsor’s Strategy for Incorporating Local Foods

Bringing summer’s bounty to hungry kids is “just common sense” according to Cathy Rogers, School Food Service Director for Pipestone Area Schools, located in a small city of 4,000 in the southwest corner of Minnesota. Every day during the summer months, she serves fresh foods from local producers to 400 of her students.

One key to her success is Rogers’ relationships with growers. By being part of the summer food safety net, local farmers and ranchers feel empowered to help combat childhood hunger. In addition, they are often able to be more flexible with pricing and delivery during the summer. Rogers’ kitchen staff is also excited about providing healthful meals to the kids, even if it means snapping a lot of beans.





The children who eat at Rogers' summer meal site are regularly served tomatoes, apples, melons, micro-greens, and even bison from local farms and ranches. Rogers' relationships with growers and staff means she can provide lots of menu choices, and provide great flavors to keep kids coming back. The produce from the district's multiple school gardens also makes the bottom line a bit easier to meet, but as Rogers says, "If the food is good, the kids are going to eat it and [the bottom line] takes care of itself."

- [Read more](#)

How Sponsors Can Help

There are a variety of ways sponsors can find local foods and agricultural activities in their communities.

- **Explore.** Use the [Know Your Farmer Know Your Food Compass](#) and the [Farm to School Census](#) to get an idea of what local procurement and regional food systems support is already occurring in your community.
- **Buy Local.** There are many ways to access local foods for your summer meals. Think about how you currently procure foods for your programming, and how you could incorporate a preference for local foods in that process:
 - Consider working with mainline produce distributors to incorporate local products, as many distributors increasingly offer local options and source of origin labeling in their product lines.
 - Sponsors using vended meals can ask vendors if they already serve local foods or communicate a preference that they do so in the future.
 - Buy directly from a producer; one way is to visit local [farmer's markets](#) for smaller purchases and simply gather three bids before making a purchase.
 - Check [here](#) to find local producer co-operatives, also known as 'food hubs,' that could aggregate products from multiple producers for larger purchases.
 - Take advantage of seasonality. Be aware of the seasonality of local products to ensure products are purchased at the best price.
- **Educate and engage.** Summer is an ideal time to get kids outdoors. Gardens are an excellent way to educate kids about where their food comes from and how to grow it. Consider growing a garden on-site, or locating farms, school or community gardens, farmers markets, or other places where you can incorporate hands-on activities and attract kids to your program. Conduct taste





tests with fresh local produce, and keep kids engaged in where their food comes from. Get creative, and [share your ideas with us!](#)

How Producers Can Get Involved

Producers can strengthen their connection to the community and help improve the quality of summer meals.

- **Sell to Summer Meal Sponsors.** Summer meals are a great way to enter the institutional market, and/or expand upon your school-based activity during the summer months. Throughout the summer, sponsors are feeding children nutritious meals that are reimbursed through USDA's [Summer Food Service Program](#). Summer [meal patterns](#) are relatively flexible and these meals are served during the peak growing season. Contact your [State agency](#) to find the nearest sponsors. Click [here](#) for a handy guide on how to sell to institutions.
- **Host activities.** Find [a list of local meal sites](#) where children are accessing meals when school is out. Summer is a great time to engage with organizations in your community and the children who rely on their programming; you can partner with sponsors to offer children fun and engaging farm-based activities that will educate them about your work and where their food comes from. *Sponsors* are organizations that administer the program through agreements with your State, while *sites* are the places where meals are actually served. Contact your [State agency](#) to find out if there are existing sponsors you can partner with to help pair nutritious meals with fun farm-based activities or field trips.
- **Spread the word!** Summer meals are a great way for families to make ends meet and ensure that children receive nutritious meals when school is out. Help ensure families in your community know where kids can go to receive a healthy meal. Families can contact the National Hunger Hotline at 1-866-3-HUNGRY or 1-877-8-HAMBRE, or visit <http://www.whyhunger.org/findfood> to locate summer feeding sites in their area.

Connect

Sponsors can reach out to the following partners for potential resources and technical assistance with incorporating local foods in SFSP.

- **Contact your [USDA Regional Farm to School Lead](#).** FNS has a Farm to School Lead in every FNS Region whose main objective is to provide training, technical assistance, and generalized support to a wide variety of farm to school





stakeholders. Sign up for the [Farm to School E-Newsletter](#) to stay in touch with all USDA Farm to School activities.

- **Contact your [National Farm to School Network State Lead](#).** The National Farm to School Network has a designated lead in each State who can help you learn more about access to local foods in your community, connect with schools, sponsors, and producers, and help you identify summer programs that may already be incorporating local foods and farm-based activities.
- **Contact your [State's Farm to School Coordinator](#).** A number of States have farm to school coordinators in their State departments of agriculture or education. In addition, throughout the country numerous public and private organizations support farm to school efforts by offering training, technical assistance, funding and other support services.
- **Youth organizations such as [4-H](#) and [Future Farmers of America](#),** even in urban areas, may have programs, activity ideas, potential sponsor contacts, or even space available for a future site. Ask about summer camps and mailing lists they might be able to share.
- **Find (or Start) a People's Garden near you.** [People's Gardens](#) vary in size and type, but all must benefit the community, in some cases by creating recreational spaces and by providing a harvest for a local food bank. These gardens might be an ideal place for a summer site!

USDA Resources

- **Explore the [Know Your Farmer Know Your Food Compass](#)** to identify local food projects and identify potential sites, vendors, or other partnerships. The Compass maps local food projects funded with Federal dollars. Project funders include Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Treasury, and USDA's Rural Development.
- **Use the [Farm to School Census](#)** to identify school districts that are already integrating farm to school activities into their meal programs, reach out to see how you can learn from or assist in their efforts.
- **Consult [Guide to Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs](#)** to discover the many strategies that sponsors can use in the procurement process to target local foods.
- **Join the [Finding, Buying, and Serving Local Foods webinar series](#);** find recordings of past webinars, and hear guidance about how schools and sponsors can target local foods.
 - **Use [Farm to School Fact Sheets](#)** that help describe some of the ways to bring local products into summer programs.



Summer Meals Toolkit

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



- Sign up for the [Farm to School E-Newsletter](#) to stay in touch with all USDA Farm to School activities, and check for stories about summer sponsors. We may just be highlighting YOUR program this summer!

Partner Organizations Resources

- **Watch** [pre-recorded webinars](#) on local foods in summer from the California Summer Meals Coalition.
- **Follow** a step-by-step guide to incorporating local foods into summer meals from the Food, Research and Action Center (FRAC): [Fresh from the Farm: Using Local Foods in the Afterschool and Summer Nutrition Programs](#).
- **Find** local farms and other information about local food in your community by checking out [Local Harvest](#).
- **Consult** this list of [gardening tips and resources](#) to encourage the use of gardens as a fun and educational summer site activity.

For Additional Information

Review these ideas and adopt the strategies that seem reasonable to you and compatible with your program. Sponsors and the general public should contact the appropriate State agency for additional guidance. State agencies should contact their FNS Regional Office for additional guidance.

List of FNS Regional Offices: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns-regional-offices>

List of State Agencies: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm>

